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ABSTRACT

Faculty certification increases the chances that online instruction in higher education will successfully meet the needs of students. This paper introduces a new approach to designing a program of faculty certification for online instruction. This curriculum includes preparation in core competencies as well as in enabling and sustaining competencies. Core competencies include: selecting materials, activities and courses that are suited for online delivery; preparing content for online delivery; delivering instruction online; managing the online course; and assessing student learning in the online environment, providing praise, encouragement, and corrective feedback as needed. Enabling competencies include: selecting a computer system and or essential components; setting up a computer system and its components; creating a healthy workspace; acquiring ergonomically sound work habits; using input devices; using the operating system; mastering advanced features of the operating system; developing word processing and spread sheet competencies; using voice input; selecting and using ADA input and output options; and operating the electronic communication system in the college/university. Sustaining competencies include evaluating the effectiveness of the online course; and altering the online course when and where appropriate. The paper also proposes that the national and state departments of education as well as accreditation institutions establish certification standards that reflect the quality of preparation defined in the proposed program of certification or a comparable program. (AEF)

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Online Mastery
A Certification Curriculum for Faculty

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ABSTRACT

Faculty certification increases the chances that online instruction in higher education will successfully meet the needs of students. This paper introduces a new approach to designing a program of faculty certification for online instruction. The paper also proposes that the national and state departments of education as well as accreditation institutions establish certification standards that reflect the quality of preparation defined in the proposed program of certification or a comparable program.

Introduction

Status of the Work: Beginning
Partners Involved: The Academy for Teaching Excellence, the School of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, and the Division of Information Technology at Metropolitan State College of Denver.
Major Goals: The project described in this paper/presentation has two goals. First, the system goal involves the introduction of a competency model of certified training of faculty that will demonstrate how faculty should be educated to develop and instruct online courses. Second, the outcomes goal involves training faculty for certification of quality online instruction.
Basic Approach: With the participation of the Director of the Academy for Teaching Excellence, the Director of Training for the Division of Information Technology, and key faculty and staff from the School of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, develop and validate a sequenced and articulate curriculum of mastery certification in online instruction.
The Educational Problem: What sort of faculty preparation does it take to equip an institution of higher education for success in online education? The authors believe that certification of faculty is essential yet very rare in the traditional colleges and universities. Few offer a sequenced, articulated program that leads to officially sanctioned certification for all faculty members who would teach online (POD Network, 2001). Barring such certification, online instruction may be devoid of any institutional standards of quality (Willis, 1994; Ridley & Husband, 1998; and Palloff & Pratt, 1999). The lack of standards rapidly translates into highly uneven quality as seen by students and hence into lost enrollment, particularly given the competition for student tuition dollars that now prevails in the domain of post-secondary online education (Berge, 1997 and Dominquez & Ridley, 1999). Therefore, for the sake of student learning and institutional success, the authors propose a new approach for preparing faculty for the online educational enterprise. Institutions should require certification of faculty for online educational instruction.
Background: The increase in online instruction in the past five years and its projected acceleration in the next twenty leave no doubt about the need for faculty professional development in online instruction both in terms of technology and pedagogical competencies (Ridley, 1996).
In the U.S. very few faculty development programs exist that train faculty in higher education to enhance their online instructional efforts (Schrum, 1995). Those that do

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exist consist of fragmented workshop programs or one-shot conferences on technology (Williams & Peters, 1997).

Description: A specific concept of a mastery certification curriculum has been developed. This curriculum includes preparation in the core competencies as well as in enabling and sustaining competencies. See below for a full description of the concept.

Validation: Two actions will assist the researchers in validating the certification model for this faculty online development training prior to the date of the Ed-Media Conference. First, the researchers will validate the concept of faculty certification training for online instruction in a conference of peers entitled "Teaching Online in Higher Education Online Conference" on November 12, 2001 in which the model for faculty development training will be discussed and assessed by an online set of peer reviewers at the conference. Second, a survey of the top ten institutions with the largest enrollments where the majority of the program majors and minors are taught online will be instituted on current faculty development programs and the data reported in the presentation at the Ed-Media Conference. In addition to these two actions, a pilot test of the model will be initiated during the summer months at Metropolitan State College of Denver through a U.S. Department of Education, Title III, Activity Two grant, the funding of which the college received for the professional development of its faculty at the institution.

Future Work and Implications for Others: The paper/presentation proposes that national and state departments of education as well as accreditation institutions establish certification standards that reflect the quality of preparation defined in the proposed program of certification or a comparable program.

Core Competencies

A program of certification in online education operates on the basis of six functions that Duchastel (1997) describes as: 1) specifying the goals to be pursued; 2) accepting diversity of outcomes; 3) requesting production of knowledge; 4) evaluating at the task level; 5) building learning teams; and 6) encouraging global communities. These functions influence the development of five core competencies learned by online instructors:

- Selecting: Selecting materials, activities and courses that are suited for online delivery
- Preparing: Preparing content for online delivery
- Delivering: Delivering instruction online
- Managing: Managing the online course
- Assessing: Assessing student learning in the online environment, providing praise, encouragement, and corrective feedback as needed.

Enabling Competencies

Many faculty members who are excellent instructors and who wish to teach online do not have the computer skills that constitute the essential threshold to online education. For these educators, the certification curriculum should offer instruction in fundamental enabling competencies including:

- Selecting a computer system and or essential components
- Setting up a computer system and its components
- Creating a healthy workspace
- Acquiring ergonomically sound work habits
- Using input devices
- Using the operating system
- Mastering advanced features of the operating system
- Developing word processing and spread sheet competencies
- Using voice input
- Selecting and using ADA input and output options
- Operating the electronic communication system in the college/university

Sustaining Competencies

To ensure that a program of online education does not fall victim to the entropy of complacency, the certification curriculum must include instruction in the competencies that are essential for creating and perpetuating excellence. These include:

- Evaluating: Evaluating the effectiveness of the online course
- Revising: Altering the online course when and where appropriate

A Closer Examination of Core Competencies

The five core competencies constitute the heart of the curriculum because they are what faculty do:

- From a vast body of domain-specific knowledge, faculty *select* the concepts, information, and skills to include in their courses.
- They *prepare* this material for instruction.
- They *deliver* it in such a way that learners can make it their own.
- They *manage* the learning experience, taking into account the mix of personality and ability among their students as well as the technology and logistics of the instructional environment.
- Throughout the course, they *assess* the learning of their students, providing praise, encouragement, and corrective feedback as needed.

Competency in these five steps is essential for success in moving from purely on-site instruction to instruction that is either partially or totally online. The following sections expand on the concept of each core competency.

1. **Selecting What to Put Online**
Faculty will inventory the courses they teach and identify materials, activities and possibly entire courses that could work well online. This component of the curriculum will provide faculty with specific guidelines for accomplishing this inventory. Faculty will be encouraged to work closely with their department chairs for validation of their selection of materials for online delivery.

2. **Preparing the Learning Experience**
With specific instructional content in mind, faculty will explore the options for preparing instruction for online delivery. They will learn pedagogical principles and techniques for making the materials they put online more effective for their students. They will learn to make accurate estimates of how long it will take to implement their plans for preparing their materials for online delivery. They will learn how to use the tools of technology to actually prepare course materials for online delivery. They also will learn how to work with specialists in multimedia development to produce advanced media components or even entire online courses.

3. **Delivering the Learning Experience**
Studies of what makes for successful classroom teaching indicate that personal dynamism, energy, and the ability to make contact with learners are major components of success. Dynamism, energy, and ability to make contact are also major factors in the success of online delivery, but the effective application of these traits requires a set of very different skills compared to classroom instruction. Workshops in this section of the curriculum will present methods of online instruction and help faculty identify those methods that are most appropriate for their teaching style and various types of course content.

4. **Managing the Online Class**
One of the most frequent comments from faculty new to online teaching is that they find it extremely time consuming. Can one avoid being overwhelmed and still provide a quality learning experience for students? What about decorum in the online environment? How does the online teacher keep the tone of the entire experience on high plane? And what does one do if students start "flaming" one another or the instructor? This component of the curriculum will present methods of managing the online class and suggest techniques for success.

5. **Assessing Student Performance**
The online learning environment puts in question many of the standard practices of on-site assessment of student performance. What kinds of tests can one offer online? Is there any way to guard against cheating? Are proctored tests a good solution? Can one assess students in other ways than just testing? Can one require graded group activities in an online course? Classes in this section of the workshop curriculum will help answer these questions by presenting options for assessing student performance in online courses with an emphasis on alternatives to the proctored written exam.

A Closer Look at Enabling Competencies

For faculty members, equipping for the online endeavor means expanding their store of knowledge and skill to include use and ultimately mastery of the essential tools of technology. It means acquiring and installing the essential computer system components. It means learning how to use those components. Finally, it means creating an ergonomically appropriate workspace and adopting healthy computer work practices. All these factors become particularly important when the faculty member plans to handle online courses from home.

Most programs of faculty preparation overlook these foundational considerations. The negative results of such omission affect the full spectrum of faculty, from computer novices to long-time veterans of computing. Some novices drop out because they never grasp the basics essential for being at ease in using computers. Others survive but fossilize in inefficient uses of their computer systems. Finally, many expert users find themselves out of action or hindered in their work due to unhealthy computing practices or poor ergonomics.

A Closer Look at Sustaining Competencies

The two sustaining competencies--evaluate and revise--are essential to ensure that flaws and weaknesses are identified and eliminated as soon as possible. This is a particularly problematic area of endeavor. Some extensive online education enterprises that have been in operation for a number of years still have not determined how to realize peer evaluation of online instruction. As to student evaluation of online instruction, it may be simple to implement but quite difficult to validate. Students come to the online learning experience with widely varying expectations and levels of competency in the computer essentials. Under such conditions, students may be incapable of differentiating between peripheral frustrations and the quality of instruction as they evaluate a specific online course and instructor. Finally, where institutional evaluation exists, it may be purely summative and generalized, serving as a poor tool for identifying what specific changes should be made to improve instruction in specific course offerings. Thus, instruction in the sustaining competencies will provide instructors the tools for formative evaluation and revision of their own courses as they are teaching them.

Summary

This curriculum will offer learning experiences that lead to certification in each of the core, enabling, and sustaining competencies. These learning experiences may be of various sorts, e.g. peer tutoring/coaching, team teaching with certified faculty, computer or Web-based instruction, workshops, classes, and seminars. Faculty who accumulate certification or validation in all competencies will earn "Online Master" certification.

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